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ABSTRACT

Students' understanding of musical style periods was assessed at Liberty Baptist College. The investigation was prompted by evidence suggesting that non-music majors who complete a music appreciation course understand a broad overview of music history better than music majors who complete music history courses. Compared to the music history classes, the music appreciation classes tend to more closely follow the Gestalt theory of learning, which involves learning whole concepts rather than individual facts. To determine whether music majors or non-music majors better understood a broad overview of various style periods, a test consisting of 25 multiple-choice items was developed and validated. The test was administered to 37 non-majors after they completed their music appreciation course and to all music majors after they completed the music history courses. It was found that non-music majors understood the broad overview of the style periods better than music majors. The college had been encouraged to require music majors to take a Gestalt-based (overview) course before taking the standard music history courses. The overview musical style periods test is appended. (SW)

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THE APPLICATION OF THE GESTALT THEORY OF LEARNING TO THE CLASSICAL MUSIC STYLE PERIODS

LEARNING THEORIES AND APPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

THE APPLICATION OF THE GESTALT THEORY OF LEARNING
TO THE CLASSICAL MUSIC
STYLE PERIODS

Steve Reitenour

There are several musical style periods (Baroque, Classical, Romantic, etc.) and these periods can be taught in a variety of ways. The Gestalt method of learning involves learning whole concepts rather than individual facts. Most college and university music majors learn about the various style periods by memorizing individual facts in music history classes while non-music majors, through humanities courses such as music appreciation, learn about the style periods by studying an overview of each period, i.e. the Gestalt method of learning. At Liberty Baptist College, Lynchburg, Virginia, such a situation exists. In order to determine whether music majors or non-music majors have a better understanding of the various style periods, a test was developed and administered to samples from both groups. The test was designed to evaluate understanding of the broad overview of the musical style periods, and the results were treated according to standard research methods. It was shown that non-music majors understand the broad overview of the style periods better than music majors, and the college has been encouraged to require music majors to take a Gestalt-based (overview) course before taking the standard music history courses.

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INTRODUCTION

Music majors at most colleges and universities, including Liberty Baptist College, are required to learn about the history of classical music by attending two semesters of junior-level music history classes. These classes tend to deal more with the details of the various musical style periods rather than a general overview of the style periods. Non-music majors usually learn about music history by attending one semester of freshman-level music appreciation classes. These classes tend to follow the Gestalt theory of learning closer than the music history classes.

The Statement of the Problem

There has been evidence to indicate that the non-music majors who have taken the music appreciation course understand the overview of music history better than the music majors who have completed the music history courses. Obviously, music majors need to understand not only the details of the musical style periods, but the overview of these periods as well.

The Research Hypothesis

Non-music majors, who have completed the music appreciation course, understand the overview of music history better than music majors who have completed the music history courses.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Review of the Literature

Gestalt psychology is based on the concept that "a thing cannot be understood by study of its constituent parts, but only by study of it as a totality" (Bigge 1971:p.59). The German word "Gestalt" has no adequate English translation, but is accepted to mean "whole, configuration, integration, a unique patterning" (Smith 1976:p.3). In learning musical knowledge, the Gestalt method has had many ramifications. Slonimsky identifies several of these areas to include form, distribution of consonances and dissonances, diatonic or chromatic tropism, symmetry or asymmetry of melorhythmic figurations, etc. (1971:p.1451). Although the traditional birthdate of Gestalt psychology is 1912 (Smith 1976:p. 24), the early Gestalt psychologist Christian von Ehrenfels was using musical sound to illustrate "Gestaltqualitaten" as early as 1890 (Sadie 1980:p.354). This practicum did not involve one of the specific areas identified by Slonimsky, but rather utilized the general principles of the Gestalt method of learning. Unfortunately, there is no more available literature written about the application of the Gestalt theory to music as it has been used in this practicum. This is a much-needed area for future research.

Significance

It was shown that non-music majors have a better understanding of the broad overview of the musical style periods than music majors,

and the college has been encouraged to require music majors to take a Gestalt based (overview) course before taking the standard music history courses.

Definition of Terms

Music Appreciation Course: a one-semester, three-credit-hour, freshman-level, first year course designed to present the student with an overview of the musical style periods.

Music History Courses: a series of two one-semester, three-credit-hour, junior level, third year course designed to present the student with the details of the musical style periods.

Music Major: a student who has chosen to center his or her college studies on music.

Non-Music Major: a student who has chosen to center his or her college studies on an area other than music.

Overview of Music History: a study that emphasizes broad information rather than details. For example, a study comparing Romanticism with Classicism would involve broad information (an Overview) while a study of the Etudes of Chopin (a Romantic composer) would involve details.

Limitations of the Study

1. A small sample of music majors: twelve music majors at Liberty Baptist College who have completed the two three-hour music history courses. This is the available population.
2. 37 non-music majors at Liberty Baptist College who have completed the one three-hour music appreciation course. These are volunteers, taken from the available population estimated at around 2000.

Basic Assumptions

1. The two sample groups (music majors and non-music majors) are homogeneous.

2. The sample of non-music majors represent the population parameters (the music majors make up the entire population).

PROCEDURES

Procedures for Collecting Data

1. A 25-item, multiple-choice test has been developed, designed to test general knowledge of the overview of music history (Appendix A).
2. The test has been validated by the chairmen of the Division of Fine Arts and the Department of Music. These men are experts in their areas of music.
3. The test was administered to music majors and non-music majors after both groups had completed their respective courses.
   a. The test was administered to 37 non-music majors who volunteered to take the test upon completion of the music appreciation course.
   b. The test was administered to all current music majors upon completion of the music history courses.
4. The test was administered to both groups by the researcher.
5. The total score of each participant was calculated by subtracting the total incorrect answers from the total possible answers.

Treatment of the Data

1. The null hypothesis: There will be no significant difference between the test scores of the music majors and the test scores of the non-music majors.
2. The independent t-test was used to test the significance of the null hypothesis, thus: H_o: $\overline{X}_e - \overline{X}_c = 0$.

3. The alternative hypothesis: There will be a significant difference between the test scores of the music majors and the test scores of the non-music majors, thus:

H_{a1}: $\overline{X}_e > \overline{X}_c$

H_{a2}: $\overline{X}_e < \overline{X}_c$

4. The level of significance: a = .05.

5. The degree of freedom: determined by $df = n_1 + n_2 - 2$

$df = 12 + 37 - 2$

$df = 47$

6. The critical t-value was determined by referring to a standard table of critical values. Since direction is predicted in the research hypothesis, a one-tailed test was utilized.

7. The appropriate independent t-test formula was applied.

RESULTS

Scores for Music Majors	
12	19
14	15
14	14
16	15
17	19
19	16

Scores for Non-Music Majors			
21	24	20	23
21	21	22	20
15	19	15	21
18	20	21	20
24	21	22	22
13	24	24	20
13	25	18	17
16	25	21	
21	23	17	
22	18	19	

1. The calculated value of t = 4.4188737

2. The critical value of t is between 1.684 and 1.671.

3. Since the calculated value of t exceeds the critical t value, the null hypothesis is rejected; there is a significant difference between the test scores of the music majors and the test scores of the non-music majors. The non-music majors scored significantly higher than the music majors on the "Overview of Music Style Periods Multiple Choice Test."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Because the difference between the calculated t-value and the critical t-value is so great, it has been shown that music majors need to take an overview course such as music appreciation before taking the music history courses.

The recommendation has been made to the chairmen of the Division of Fine Arts and the Department of Music to add the music appreciation course as a required course for music majors. Because of the curriculum structure at Liberty Baptist College, this recommendation must follow a set criteria. The chairmen must initiate this recommendation.

The recommendation has been made to the music faculty and the college Advising Center to recommend the music appreciation course to their music major advisees as a preparation for music history.

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APPENDIX A

OVERVIEW OF MUSICAL STYLE PERIODS
MULTIPLE CHOICE TEST

Liberty Baptist College
S. Reitenour, M.S.

Check One:
Music Major__
Nonmusic Major__

Directions: Circle the correct letter.

1. The correct chronological order of the various style periods is:
   a. Romantic, Classical, Renaissance, Baroque, 20th Century.
   b. Renaissance, Classical, Romantic, Baroque, 20th Century.
   c. Baroque, Renaissance, Classical, Romantic, 20th Century.
   d. Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, 20th Century.
   e. Classical, Romantic, Renaissance, Baroque, 20th Century.

2. The three main parts of sonata-allegro form, in correct order are:
   a. binary, ternary, and coda.
   b. exposition, development, and recapitulation.
   c. introduction, exposition, and coda.
   d. theme, variations, and coda.
   e. introduction, exposition, and recapitulation.

3. When compared with the second theme, the first theme of a sonata-allegro is usually:
   a. fast and rhythmic.
   b. slow and lyrical.
   c. slow and soft.
   d. considered unimportant.
   e. called a "scherzo."

4. Johann Sebastian Bach lived:
   a. from 1610 to 1685.
   b. from 1704 to 1775.
   c. from 1685 to 1750.
   d. from 1634 to 1703.
   e. from 1595 to 1634.

5. The two main parts of the Mass are:
   a. the Kyrie and the Sanctus.
   b. the proper and the ordinary.
   c. the cantus firmus and the agnus dei.
   d. the motet and the organum.
   e. the Credo and the Gloria.

6. The music of Claude Debussy represents the:
   a. Romantic period.
   b. Baroque period.
   c. Renaissance period.
   d. Classical period.
   e. Impressionism period.

7. George Gershwin combined classical music with:
   a. native African music.
   b. jazz.
   c. rock.
   d. country-western
   e. television commercials.

8. The origin of opera can be traced to a group of men known as the Camerata during the:
   a. Romantic period.
   b. Baroque period.
   c. Renaissance period.
   d. Classical period.
   e. Impressionism period.

9. Igor Stravinsky is best know for the three ballets, which are:
   a. the Firebird, Petrushka, and the Rite of Spring.
   b. the Nutcracker, Swan Lake and Sleeping Beauty.
   c. Coppelia, Petrushka, and the Firebird.
   d. Swan lake, Coppelia, and Petrushka.
   e. the Firebird, the Rite of Spring, and Coppelia.

10. Counterpoint is an example of:
   a. homophonic texture.
   b. monophonic texture.
   c. polyphonic texture.
   d. heterophonic texture.
   e. contraphonic texture.

11. The term "retrograde-inversion" usually refers to:
   a. the melody.
   b. the harmony.
   c. the rhythm.
   d. duration.
   e. chords.

12. Which of the following does not describe Gregorian chant?
   a. monophonic texture.
   b. organized by Pope Gregory the Great.
   c. written using major or minor keys.
   d. used in the medieval church.
   e. numbered over 3000.

13. The first musical book published in America was:
   a. the Moravian Psalter.
   b. the Sacred Harp.
   c. Hopkinson's collection of American tunes.
   d. the Bay Psalm book.
   e. the Quaker Hymn book.

14. The earliest form of polyphonic music is known as:
   a. organum.
   b. the motet.
   c. cantus firmus.
   d. Gregorian chant.
   e. the missa.

15. Ludwig van Beethoven is considered a bridge:
   a. from the Romantic period to the Classical period.
   b. from the Baroque period to the Classical period.
   c. from the Classical period to the Baroque period.
   d. from the Romantic period to the Baroque period.
   e. from the Classical period to the Romantic period.

16. The death of J.S. Bach marked the end of the:
    a. Middle Ages
    b. Baroque period.
    c. Romantic period.
    d. Renaissance period.
    e. Classical period.

17. A composer who lived during the Romantic period, but prefered the tradition and forms of the Classical period was:
    a. Dvořák.
    b. Brahms.
    c. Tchaikovsky.
    d. Beethoven.
    e. Wagner.

18. The music of Charles Ives was considered futuristic because of his use of:
    a. the synthesizer.
    b. the tape recorder.
    c. prepared pianos.
    d. polyrhythms and polyharmonies.
    e. sound effects as percussion instruments.

19. Joseph Haydn is an example of the patronage system working at its best. For almost thirty years he worked for:
    a. Beethoven.
    b. J.S. Bach.
    c. the Esterhazys.
    d. Von Colloredo.
    e. St. Stephen's Cathedral.

20. Tchaikovsky was supported financially by a woman who refused to meet the composer, and unexpectantly cut off the support. Her name was:
    a. Clara Schumann.
    b. Madam von Meck.
    c. Zart Heimlich.
    d. Antonina Milinkov.
    e. Madam Czardis.

21. W.A. Mozart died at the age of 35.
    a. Because of his faith, he was given a full church funeral.
    b. Because of his musical contributions, he was given a spectacular funeral.
    c. Because of his love for his wife, he was buried at his own home.
    d. Because of his debts, he was given a pauper's funeral.
    e. Because of his wealth, he was given a royal funeral.

22. Beethoven was born in 1770 in:
    a. Bonn, Germany.
    b. Vienna, Austria.
    c. London, England.
    d. Berlin, Germany.
    e. Paris, France.

23. Which of the following statements is true?
    a. The Classical period followed the Romantic period.
    b. The Romantic period emphasized order, poise, and serenity.
    c. The Romantic period lasted approximately 80 years (from 1720 to 1800).
    d. The American, French, and Industrial Revolutions had a great impact on the Romantic period.
    e. The Romantic period brought a transfer of power from the middle class to the upper and lower classes.

24. The church modes were finally replaced by:
    a. Gregorian chants.
    b. the mass.
    c. the major/minor system.
    d. the clavier.
    e. counterpoint.

25. Which of the following statements does <u>not</u> relate to Richard Wagner?
    a. He called his opera "musical-dramas."
    b. He stated "I am first of all an Italian."
    c. He wrote both the words and music for his operas.
    d. He developed the concept of the leitmotiv.
    e. He emphasized chromatic harmony.